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Expressing the Inexpressible: the work of Mons John Cyril Hawes, priest and architect

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“The Expressible and the Inexpressible”

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Title of paper: Expressing the Inexpressible: the work of Mons John Cyril Hawes, priest and architect.

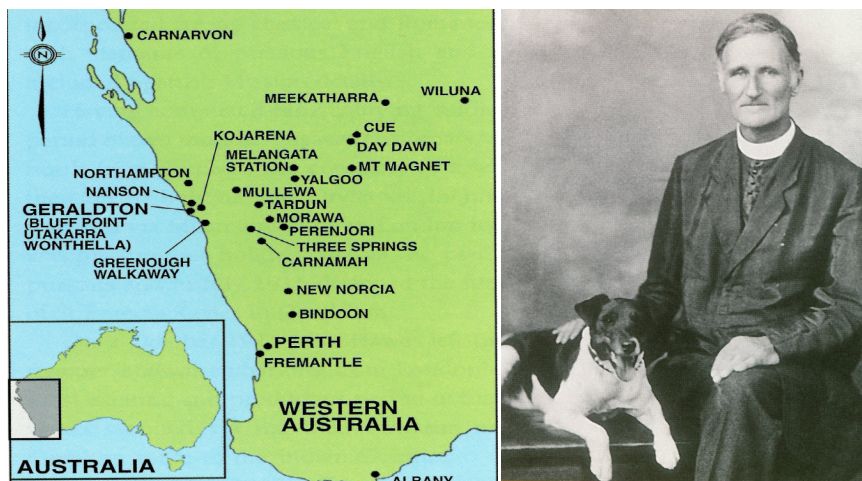
Abstract:

What is the result of the combination of priest and architect, Anglican and Catholic heritage, English and Roman education in a deeply faith filled man?

The answer can be found in the hot and dry country of Geraldton Diocese Western Australia in the work of priest and architect Monsignor John Cyril Hawes (1876-1956). Hawes expresses the inexpressible through his many churches, hermitages, chapels, residential buildings and the Cathedral in Geraldton as well as other buildings in many other parts of the world. His deep and passionate faith is expressed in the eclectic use of symbols and forms encountered in his work and yet his buildings also express his concern for the human person as they ‘fit’ in the Mediterranean climate and are scaled to fit each community. This paper will explore Hawes’ visual theology made evident through his buildings in Western Australia and through the individual art works he created to live within those buildings. His iconography is ‘borrowed’ from many traditions and brought to life in a unique way in gargoyles, relief sculptures, paintings, baldachin, designs, stained glass windows, drawings and other artefacts. He was a man of his times and the challenge for those who live and worship in these buildings today is to preserve these earthly treasures of his legacy and yet function within them while celebrating liturgies in the 21st century.

On a recent visit to further explore some of Hawes' buildings, the parish priest of Mullewa commented on the fact that there are still people in Mullewa who are able to remember the architect priest but we are now far enough along in years to not remember the difficult bits and to only remember the genius. This paper explores the genius and the contribution that Hawes has made to the wider Church as well as to the art and architectural heritage of Australia.

John Cyril Hawes, born 7 September 1876, was raised in Richmond, England, along with his two older brothers by his parents Edward and Amelia Hawes.¹ At the age of 16 his father suggested that he should take up the architectural profession since he had an aptitude for drawing. "I would have liked to be a clergyman ('Ritualistic' of course) but said nothing. So I was articled to the Firm of Edmeston & Gabriel of Broad Street in the City of London."² While he threw himself into the study of architecture with "unbounded enthusiasm" as it was the "very essence and substance of those old cathedrals, abbeys and churches that I loved. I soon decided that it was an Art and the highest of all the arts, and not a profession. And as for Edmeston he had no more art in his constitution than the office caretaker's cat!"³ While working for five years with Edmeston & Gabriel to become a qualified architect he spent two nights a week studying at the Architectural Association and the other three nights at the London County Council Art and Crafts School.⁴ "I was a demon for work but what happy times they were!"⁵ The latter is where he acquired the skills of architectural modelling, drawing, stone masonry, lead work, sculpture and other crafts that became evident in his buildings in Western Australia.



A map showing relevant places to Hawes' work in WA.

Photograph of Mons Hawes with his constant companion, Dominie.

Taken from *Between Devotion and Design*, John J. Taylor, 2000, p. 56 and p. 119

¹ John J. Taylor, *Between Devotion and Design, The Architecture of John Cyril Hawes 1876-1956*, (Nedlands, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press), 2.

² John Cyril Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, Archives of the Geraldton Diocese of the Catholic Church, Bishop's House Geraldton, 18.

³ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 18

⁴ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 19-20.

⁵ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 20.

In the Easter vacation of 1893 he travelled to France with his brother. He was already discovering that he was an Anglo-Catholic and felt deeply moved by the rituals of Catholicism. When he found himself in the mediaeval town of Caen he felt he was in heaven.

It was all so different from England. I went into several churches, richly dim and mysterious, with twinkling light of candles glimmering here and there where priest were offering the holy Mass in little side-chapels; no glare of electric daylight; no stiff rows of long pews, but Prieu-Dieus and chairs higgledy piggledy anyhow. Worshippers knelt at prayer in reverent silence, nor was there any loud mouthing at them by the minister of long prayers. Only the quiet 'blessed mutter of the Mass'. The very atmosphere moved to worship, to bring one to one's knees. Truly this was 'My Father's House'.⁶



Milan Cathedral, photo Angela McCarthy, 2009.

Hawes considered Mediaeval Gothic to be the “unalloyed product of the Christian religion, it has evolved from Catholicism, God’s Truth. In such buildings as Chartres, Amiens, Beauvais and Milan architecture has reached its highest expression, the summit of perfection. This can never again be surpassed or equalled.” He declared that Pagan Greek architecture was the expression of the perfection of sensual beauty and Gothic was the expression of spiritual beauty.⁷ As he developed spiritually and religiously, what he expressed in his architecture changed and the specific needs of the community became paramount in his design. He was

⁶ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 23.

⁷ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 24.

deeply connected to the spirituality of St Francis throughout his life and kept in mind how, out of humility, Francis would not consent to be a priest. But at the urging of Bishop Hornby, (in whose diocese he had built his first church at Gunnerton in 1899) Hawes went to Lincoln Theological College.⁸ Later he became an Anglican Benedictine Monk at the Caldey Islands in Wales but after the 1908 hurricane that devastated the Bahamas he was asked by Bishop Hornby to go to the Bahamas to help rebuild the community.⁹ During his eight years as an Anglican clergyman he had strong leanings towards Catholicism and a “constant upsurging of doubts and questionings as to Anglicanism and its Orders” and finally in 1910 discovered the ‘necessity of certitude’¹⁰ and was received into the Catholic Church on 19 March 1911 in the Franciscan Friary, Graymoor, New York.¹¹



Franciscan Friars of the Atonement
Graymoor, New York, USA.
<http://catholicplaces.org/grayfriars.htm>

For the next four years he left priesthood and ministry behind and he worked in various capacities beginning in Canada where he looked for work as an architect but was employed as a labourer on a construction site near Calgary where they were building a pass through the mountains. Eventually, to work his way back to the East coast and from there to return to England, he took charge of a van of cattle where he often “slept in the hay-rack over the beasts’ heads.”¹²

In January 1912 Hawes arrived in Rome and began his studies towards the priesthood at Beda Theological College where he met Dr Kelly, the bishop of Geraldton, who was visiting in search of priests for his diocese in Western Australia which was “the biggest, poorest and wildest on the continent.”¹³ They had discussions about the cathedral that Bishop Kelly hoped to build and Hawes did sketches of his desire to have it “round with seats converging on the altar.”¹⁴ Kelly was impressed with the drawings as they were just as he had imagined the new cathedral. Hawes agreed to join Kelly after his ordination. He was ordained priest in St John

⁸ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 28.

⁹ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 34.

¹⁰ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 44.

¹¹ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 51.

¹² Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 56.

¹³ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 58.

¹⁴ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 58.

Lateran cathedral in Rome in 1915 and later that year sailed for Geraldton.¹⁵ In 1916 he was appointed parish priest of the Mullewa-Yalgoo parish and remained there for twenty two years. During this time he built many church and secular buildings but the remainder of this paper will concentrate on the Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and Ss Peter & Paul.



Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and Ss Peter & Paul, Mullewa, Western Australia.

Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2011.

While Hawes delighted in the spiritual perfection of the High Gothic cathedrals, his own spirituality was deeply rooted in the legacy of St Francis of Assisi. Hawes was a member of the Third Order of St Francis and used the religious name of Fra Jerome. Unlike the great cathedrals of Europe where one's eyes are drawn upwards in an expression of the transcendence of God, Franciscan spirituality has a different perspective. St Francis understood that Jesus was the embodiment of God. The incarnation means that God who became flesh in Jesus is truly present in the world. Like Francis then, Hawes appreciated that God's presence through Jesus was in the material world. His artwork and buildings recognise this aspect of his theology. They are rooted in the ground, constructed of local materials, at peace with their environment. A local Mullewa parishioner who I spoke to had a different perspective about the local materials. He remembers Hawes and said that he left a whole lot of problems behind because he used local stone that is very crumbly! How do you care for such a legacy? Hawes' work was in the service of liturgy, and generated by the liturgy as liturgy "is moreover itself *art* and a *generator of art*."¹⁶

Like many a true artist, Hawes was very particular about what he designed and did not like alterations of any kind unless he was consulted. His major successful buildings he supervised or built himself because of this part of his nature. Hawes designed a church for Carnarvon, a town north of Geraldton, but ran into difficulties when his insistence that nothing be changed

¹⁵ Hawes, Typed Transcription of Hawes' Journal, 58-59.

¹⁶ Timothy Verdon, "Art and the Liturgy", *Interpretation*, October 2007, 359.

without consultation with him was construed to mean that no-one in Carnarvon could have input to the design. The argument was eventually mediated by the Bishop.



Hawes' model of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Carnarvon. From the archives of the Bishop's House, Geraldton Archdiocese, Western Australia.

Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

Hawes was also very particular about liturgical needs. He wrote with concern to his favourite journal of the time, *Liturgical Arts*, because he noted that there were “illustrations showing altars of the Blessed Sacrament with only two candlesticks thereon; one on either side of the tabernacle.”¹⁷ The editor duly replied that following a careful study of the volumes containing the Authentic Decrees of the Sacred congregation of Rites they had failed to find any decree that said there had to be six candlesticks. In Mullewa then, since there was no restriction, he used only four candlesticks as it suited his design.



Original 'high altar' in St Mary's Mullewa.

Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012

The Mullewa church took seven years to build and Hawes poured much of his heart and soul, and his own sweat, into its construction. Since there was little money to spare, the “farmers

¹⁷ John C. Hawes, *Correspondence – letter from Fra Jerome O.S.F.*, Vol. 16, no. 4, August 1948, pp. 134-5.

carted in all the stone but we could not afford to pay the then current wage of nine pounds a week to a mason so I set to work myself with the assistance of one paid labourer only.”¹⁸ Hawes chose to use a Romanesque style for this church, much of which he built himself out of the local rock with the help of local people, “somewhat after that of the churches of southern France at the period when Romanesque was in a state of transition to the Gothic.”¹⁹ Hawes believed that a “church, even the smallest, should be of a monumental character. Solidity is more important than ornamentation.” The scale of the Mullewa church is tied to a human scale and so retains a sense of intimacy and is also reminiscent of the Spanish Franciscan Mission churches in California.



Side entrance to St Mary's, Mullewa.
The Christ the King entrance.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012



The bell ringer's viewhole.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

To the smallest detail in St Mary's of Mullewa Hawes followed the liturgical requirements of the Roman Ritual and also embellished it with many different symbolic details that were eclectic and enunciated his theology of sacramentality. On the northern side there is a bell tower with seven bells, and there is a special hole in the wall for the bell ringer to see into the sanctuary to ring the bells appropriately at the elevation of the host and the chalice. The main entrance is crowned with a corbelled pediment that has inscribed with Roman lettering which in his own translation reads: “To God Most Good, Most Great: and in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, and the Holy apostles Peter and Paul, this Holy Temple is dedicated.” The twin doors are divided by a pillar which combines with the three on either side to make seven, the mystic number, and Hawes refers to Proverbs 9:1 “Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven pillars.” The spaces between the pillars were intended for statues of the greater prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel and Daniel). Along the frieze there are depictions of the seven sacraments: Baptism, Confession (Reconciliation) and

¹⁸ John Cyril Hawes, typed transcription of Hawes' journal, Bishop's House archives, Geraldton.

¹⁹ All of the following details are quoted from John Cyril Hawes, *Souvenir of the Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and S.S. Peter & Paul, Mullewa Western Australia*, 2nd Ed. c. 1930s, n.p.

Confirmation on the left, Extreme Unction (Anointing of the Sick), Holy Orders and Matrimony on the right, with three expressions of Eucharist in the middle – reception of Holy Communion, as Sacrifice in the Mass, and as the Real Presence with the host being carried in procession.



Front entrance to St Mary's Mullewa, showing the seven pillars and the pediment. Photos: Angela McCarthy, 2011.



As you can see, on either side of the entrance there are two extensions. The one on the left is a porch extending to the north, the Christ the King entrance, and on the right is the Baptistry. The Baptistry is small but reminiscent of many similar ancient spaces. Above the font is a Baldachino on four columns. The Baldachino is like the canopy covering the sacred when

carried in procession or in its permanent place, like the tent of the Ark of the Covenant. Hawes used this honorary form in many of his designs including in the same church above the altar and also above the main altar in the church at Perenjori.



Baptismal Font in St Mary's Mullewa with baldachino.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012



Baldachino covering the original altar in Perenjori church.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2011.



Baldachino above the main altar in St Mary's Mullewa.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

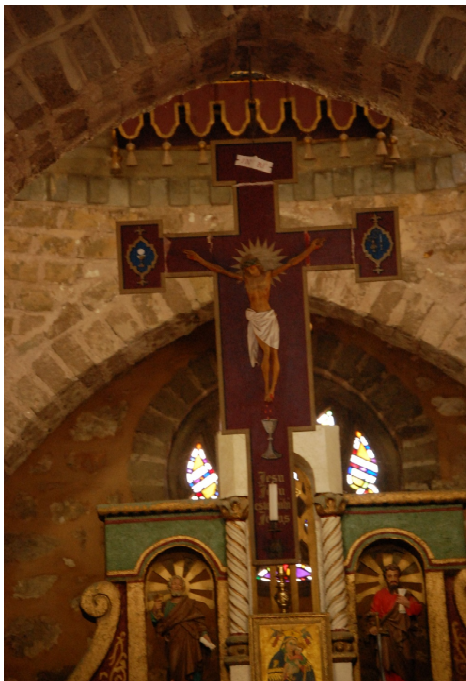
The Mullewa church has five altars upon which the sacrifice of the Mass can be offered. This of course is not common in post Vatican II churches, but when it was acceptable for a priest to say Mass by himself this was quite the norm. Under the sanctuary arch before the main altar hangs the Rood. In Mediaeval churches the rood could extend to a screen that obscured the altar from the main body of the nave so that only the ordained ministry could see the celebration of the Mass. This is similar to the iconostasis in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition. In pilgrimage churches like the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi this screen was eventually removed as many wealthy lay women began to patronise the church and insist on seeing the celebration of the Mass. In many cases it was then restricted to a large crucifix, as at Mullewa. This too is reminiscent of the Franciscan churches, particularly Santa Chiara in Assisi, where the Rood is the crucifix through which St Francis had his vision of Christ telling him to fix the Church!



Crucifix of San Damiano, Santa Chiara in Assisi.

<http://nuke.sangiuseppeformia.net/>

The nave of the church (from the Latin, *navis*, ship), symbolises the Church as a pilgrim on earth and the sanctuary symbolises heaven. It is only through Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection that we can enter into heaven. While not every worshipping member of the community will have these symbols in mind at every Mass, the community can be drawn into the Paschal Mystery through developing the language, the iconography of the sacred space. Our contemporary communities can often be completely devoid of the language of iconography and so the richness is lost. Hawes' commentary about the symbolic aspects of the Mullewa church in the *Souvenir of the Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel and S.S. Peter & Paul, Mullewa Western Australia*, is very valuable as documentary evidence of his iconology and theological understanding.



St Mary's Mullewa showing the Rood with the baldachino evident above and the location of the main altar.

Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

Hawes' seemingly endless capacity to gather symbols to express the inexpressible cannot be fully examined in this short paper but two last aspects will be examined. On the left hand side of the Rood arch is the altar of the Holy Rood with a Retablo (reredos in English) using

iconography drawn from traditional Christian art images. Hawes describes the iconography as follows:

On the apex the crucifixion, in the central niche an “Ecce Hommo” (Behold the Man) - our Lord in the purple robe and crowned with thorns, as He stood before Pilate. Below this is a “Pieta” representing the Blessed Mother of Sorrows and St John tending the sacred Body taken down from the cross. On the side panels are shields with emblems of the Passion – the scourges, crown of thorns, spear and reed with sponge, hammer and nails, the money-bags with the thirty pieces of silver. Across the plinth runs the inscription “Faithful Cross above all others, one and only noble tree” – from the Good Friday hymn “Pange Lingua.” Carved wooden angels, painted and gilded, support sconces with tapers on the four corner posts of the altar.



Altar of the Holy Rood,
St Mary's Mullewa.
Photo: Angela McCarthy,
2012.

The communion rails remain in the church (although this makes the current form of communion procession very chaotic when there is a large congregation and Communion is received under both species) and five steps lead to the High Altar. Four pendentives between the arches carry the cupola rising above the sanctuary – the House of the Altar for the Romanesque builders. This cupola was built from the outside with no interior supporting structure and on its summit there is a circular turret with glazed windows to form a lantern which naturally lights the sanctuary and draws one towards the place of Sacrifice. A similar form was used in St Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Geraldton.



Cupola over the sanctuary showing the lantern, the baldachino, and the pendentives supporting the cupola.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

In the sanctuary and above the tabernacle is the Throne of Exposition. Below this is the oil painting of Our lady of Mt Carmel, the patroness of the parish. On either side stand statues of Ss Peter and Paul, the subsidiary patrons. Both hold their iconographical attributes: Peter holding the keys and with a cock at his feet, and Paul with the sword of his execution and the scroll of the epistles. The next level down holds six statues (the three magi, the shepherds and St Francis) all turned in adoration to the tabernacle – the House of Bread, Bethlehem. This reflects Hawes' theological understanding of the humility and simplicity required to become part of the Kingdom of God.



Main altar, St Mary's Mullewa.
Photo: Angela McCarthy, 2012.

There is much more detail and symbolic representation in this small church at Mullewa but this paper cannot cover it all. In contemporary terms this might seem as though it is a cluttered space and yet when contemplating our inexpressible God in this sacred space, there seems to be glimpses of expression surrounding the prayerful person which leads to the sacred in profound ways. This is certainly a part of our rich art and architectural history in Australia which well deserves the efforts and financial support needed for its preservation.